



Canadian Commission for UNESCO

58th Annual General Meeting

Wabano Centre, Ottawa, 6-8 June 2018

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019

UNESCO has been designated lead UN agency for the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, which aims to draw attention to the urgent need to raise awareness of Indigenous languages and to support their preservation, maintenance and revitalization all over the world.

In this context, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) is uniquely situated to work with its members and broad networks to mobilize their full resources to contribute to a critical and growing social movement in support of Indigenous languages and cultures in Canada.

Language is relevant to all of UNESCO's mandated areas, with no exception, and we wish to engage our members and networks in reflecting on how we can all contribute to concrete initiatives in 2019 and beyond. For this reason, the 58th Annual General Meeting of CCUNESCO will be devoted to Indigenous languages and cultures and their role in sustainable development, reconciliation, good governance and peace building.

The 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages will promote activities aimed at:

- Focusing global attention on the critical risks confronting Indigenous languages and the significance of such risks for sustainable development, reconciliation, good governance and peace building
- Targeting steps that will lead to improved quality of life, enhanced international cooperation and strengthened intercultural dialogue, and reaffirming cultural and linguistic continuity
- Increasing the capacities of all stakeholders to enact concrete and sustainable measures at every level to support, access and promote Indigenous languages around the world in accordance with the legitimate rights of Indigenous peoples.

Despite the ongoing effects of colonization in Canada, Indigenous languages and cultures have continued to exist and have been passed down through the generations. The vibrancy of cultures and languages is both a strong indicator of, and a contributing factor to, the resilience of Indigenous cultures and communities. Each Indigenous language reflects unique values and world views, and is inextricably linked to ecological knowledge, spirituality, tradition, social relations and community well-being.

Indigenous languages encapsulate complex knowledge systems that developed and accumulated on this land over thousands of years. Many Indigenous languages are considered to be endangered, and their preservation, maintenance and revitalization are of crucial importance to Indigenous peoples and to Canadian society more broadly.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission put forward Calls to Action that serve to guide all Canadians, including all levels of government, the media, the private sector, and civil society. A number of the Calls to Action are directly related to the strengthening, preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures, including a call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act. In response to the Calls to Action, interest in supporting and promoting Indigenous cultures and languages is growing across Canada, and legislation on Indigenous languages will be tabled in the summer of 2018. The CCUNESCO would like to seize upon this growing level of public understanding and interest to engage its members and networks in a collective reflection on actions and initiatives that they can undertake to support reconciliation.

The CCUNESCO has already started engaging with its members and networks to reflect on how to contribute to the 2019 UN International Year of Indigenous Languages. Through this process, members and partners have already noted the pressing need to foster greater awareness among the general public of Indigenous languages as crucially important to the health and vibrancy of Indigenous cultures. There is also a need to promote positive messages and success stories that will foster a more nuanced public awareness. The AGM will therefore be an opportunity to raise awareness of ongoing initiatives and good practices, both from within our networks and members and from the grassroots level. Over the course of the Symposium Day (June 7), participants will have the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with key players in this field and share their own success stories.

It is hoped that this dialogue will inspire action and reflection towards attaining the goals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. The CCUNESCO's networks will be both motivated and empowered to mobilize their resources to support the preservation, maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous languages. To this end, we wish to ensure that 2019 will have a long-lasting impact, both in Canada and internationally.

References

Truth and Reconciliation Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.

United Nations Economic and Social Council. E/C.19/2018/8. *Action plan for organizing the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages*. (21 February 2018)